

11th District

1998 Session News



Rep. Eileen Cody



Rep. Velma Veloria

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(Ranking Minority Member)
Appropriations
Law and Justice

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(Ranking Minority Member)
Education

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February 1998

Dear Neighbors:

As we enter the 1998 legislative session, we face great opportunities. Our state is blessed with thriving high-tech, biomedical, and aerospace industries; with abundant farms, orchards and natural resources; and a healthy revenue surplus.

Amid such prosperity, we must recognize that it's everyday people who work hard to make Washington state's economy strong, and our quality of life special. We believe these same working people deserve a brighter future for themselves and their communities.

The 1998 session holds several challenges for Washington's working people. Legislation concerning a multitude of issues will have a direct impact on the lives of every citizen. What impact will possible energy deregulation have on your electric bill? Could deregulation cause your energy bill to rise 30%? Under new legislation, how affordable is Washington's Basic Health Plan insurance for the working poor, for whom the program exists? Will our schools continue to receive less state funding each year, losing to inflation? Will working families receive meaningful tax cuts — after 80% of the \$1.4 billion in tax cuts since 1994 have gone to special interests?

This session will only last 60 days, which means legislation will be moving swiftly. We welcome hearing your views as the session progresses. You may call the toll-free hotline at 1-800-562-6000. It is an honor to serve as your Representatives.

Regards,

Eileen Cody
Eileen Cody
State Representative

Velma Veloria
Velma Veloria
State Representative



Reps. Eileen Cody and Velma Veloria



Your Health

We were pleased by the turnout for the 11th District Health Forum, which we held last month. Despite exciting innovations in medical science, adequate health care is increasingly inaccessible to many working families. Constituents described the prohibitive cost of health care, lack of integrated and holistic treatment, and lack of culturally-relevant services.

We will continue to advocate for health care policies that are fair to all. Rep. Cody is the primary sponsor of legislation requiring maternity benefits to be included in every insurance plan. She is also spearheading legislation requiring insurance companies to pay for contraceptives, to reduce unintended pregnancies. We are also concerned about the rising cost of Washington's Basic Health Plan (BHP), which was designed for the working poor. Premiums have tripled in some cases, screening out the working poor who need it most.



Education and Our Children

Amid our state's economic prosperity, funding for schools continues to decline, losing to inflation. We are spending \$261 less per student since 1993 (adjusted for inflation). That's \$7,500 less for an average classroom! Meanwhile, the recent 4th-grade test scores clearly demonstrate the need for increased investments to help all children achieve higher academic standards.

The trend toward decreasing support for education must be reversed. We applaud Governor Locke's recent proposal calling for a volunteer reading corps. The Governor is proposing a \$28 million volunteer tutoring program, which would use 25,000 volunteers to work with 82,000 children in second to fifth grade.

We also believe we must reduce class size. Washington's classrooms are among the most crowded in the nation. Only three states have more crowded classrooms. We also support legislation which would: 1) provide full-day kindergarten, 2) fund the critical extra time students need to meet the

new standards, including tutorials and after-school programs and 3) enable classroom teachers to take full advantage of new technology.



Deregulation and Your Electric Bill

We in Washington state enjoy the nation's cheapest, cleanest power. Would that change if our energy was deregulated? Under deregulation, you would choose your power company much like you now choose long distance companies. Proponents claim energy rates would drop. But opponents of deregulation point to a Department of Energy study predicting NW rates would rise 30%. Under deregulation, the largest industries and out-of-state buyers could get the cheapest rates by buying in bulk. Small businesses and residential customers could be left paying high, convenience-market prices.

There are other risks to deregulation. Utilities could be tempted to increase the amount of power considered "surplus," to sell outside our region. That could result in "brown-outs," such as experienced on the East Coast. When profit becomes the driving force in energy sales, will companies continue to pay for things consumers consider important, such as low-income energy assistance, restoring salmon runs hurt by hydro dams, weatherization programs for the elderly and poor, and generating power with more expensive, clean-burning fuel? As deregulation talks proceed, we'll continue to seek protections for consumers.



Transportation and Your Commute

Seattle is now the sixth most traffic-congested city in the nation. Overall in Washington state, traffic has doubled in the last 15 years. And the trend is for more growth — as more than 100,000 people enter our state each year.

Ironically, the state has a huge surplus in its general fund, but has decreased transportation

11th District 1998 Session News



funding. In fact, this year's transportation budget is \$100 million less than last year's budget. That means we can barely keep up with maintenance of existing roads. No major new construction is funded this biennium and reduced funds have forced delays in existing highway projects.

Meanwhile, we cannot procrastinate too long. Traffic tie-ups mean increased air pollution, more accidents, and more travel time. The direct impact of traffic on Puget Sound residents is estimated at \$1.3 billion each year in lost productivity and wasted fuel.



Fairness for Working Families:

Not all are sharing in the fruits of our good economy. Many Washington employers don't provide their workers with livable wages, basic employment benefits, or a reasonable level of job security. House Democrats seek to raise Washington's minimum wage (now the lowest on the West Coast) to \$6.50 an hour by 2000. That would enable a family of three, headed by an adult working full-time at minimum wage, to rise above the poverty level for the first time in several years.

On another matter, benefits for part-time workers is becoming a major issue – as the recent UPS strike demonstrated. If part-time employees are doing the same work as their full-time counterparts, shouldn't they have the same benefits – on a pro rata basis? We believe so. Hence, we're studying several proposals which might make equitable benefits workable in our state. We'll be researching the experience of other states in this matter and hope to have proposed legislation soon.

During this session, we also support strengthening families through the extension of family leave benefits. We will sponsor proposals which allow workers leave to attend school conferences or medical emergencies.

We also want fair tax cuts for all citizens. Only 20% of the \$1.4 billion in tax cuts approved over the past three years benefitted

working families. We believe working families and seniors should share in our state's economic prosperity. We believe that any further tax relief plans in 1998 must be simple, fair, and equal to all people.



Trade Mission to Asia

Rep. Veloria and Lt. Governor Brad Owen led a trade delegation to Asia recently to increase Washington trade. The 41-member "Washington State Trade and Investment Mission" traveled to Seoul, Korea; Shanghai, China; and Manila and Pangasinan in the Philippines.

The purpose of the trade mission, organized jointly by the Washington State Community, Trade and Economic Development Initiative, the Korean-American Chamber of Commerce and the Washington-Pangasinan Sister State Association, was to promote trade links between Washington businesses and the Pacific Rim participants.

Previous trade missions to Asia have resulted in millions of dollars for Washington state. This mission emphasized opportunities for small and mid-sized businesses. Participants in the trade mission ranged from a Seattle architectural company to an American seed company which needs inexpensive land to grow seed.



Toll-free Legislative Hotline: 1-800-562-6000



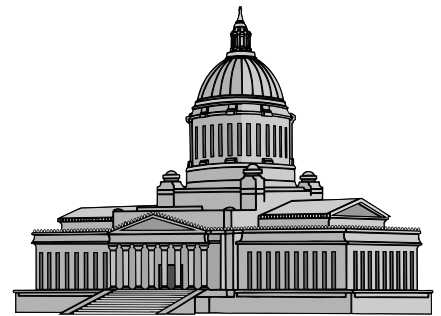
Reps. Eileen Cody and Velma Veloria

11th District Survey Results


We were pleased with the many respondents who answered our recent 11th District survey. We were gratified that more than 1,000 people took time out from their busy schedules to respond.

Surveys showed that 11th District constituents are forward-thinking: demonstrating support for stronger education, more affordable health care, reduction of traffic congestion, and greater prevention efforts to stem juvenile crime. Regarding specific ways to improve education — most respondents agreed with a simple majority vote to pass school levies, integrating parenting skills training into classroom curriculum, and all-day kindergarten. They also supported greater funding of the Basic Health Plan, which provides accessible health insurance for low-income working families.

What's uppermost in the minds of 11th District constituents? Their top legislative issues of interest (ranked in order of importance, from first to last) are: education, crime, health care, government efficiency, transportation, environment, growth management, tax relief, consumer protection, and economic development.



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